

Judah Ha-Levi

The peak of Spanish Hebrew poetry was reached in the works of Judah ben Samuel ha-Levi. He excelled in all the media of his art, and he is generally considered to be the greatest of all post-biblical Hebrew poets.

He was born in Tudela not later than 1075. Tudela was close to the Christian part of Spain, and it is possible that as a young boy he had some experience of life in that part of the peninsula. However, he desired to pursue his learning in Southern Spain among the Jews living under Muslim rule. And so he came to Granada, where he was befriended by Moses ibn Ezra – a friendship which lasted throughout ibn Ezra's period of exile in Northern Spain.

After the devastation of Granada in 1090 he appears to have gone to Lucena, and also to have visited Seville. He went to Toledo after it had become part of Alfonso's kingdom of Castille. In 1109 however there was a persecution of Jews in Castille, and ha-Levi returned to the Muslim city of Cordoba. The situation of the Jews now became extremely difficult in Spain. They suffered both economically and spiritually as a result of the Christian–Muslim conflict, and there were those who foresaw complete disaster.

Judah ha-Levi believed that the redemption of the Jews would be accomplished by their return to the Holy Land. He himself determined to go on pilgrimage and settle there. He met with opposition both to his personal departure and to his ideas. But his belief became for him a strong emotional desire, and this theme forms one of the most characteristic elements of his work, both in his poems and in his philosophical dialogue, 'The Kuzari'.

Judah ha-Levi did depart from Spain for Egypt en route to the Holy Land. We know that he landed at Alexandria and visited Cairo, appreciating the life and the civilization of the

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Egyptian Jews. It is probable that he died in Egypt in 1141, although a legend would have it that he succeeded in reaching Jerusalem and was slain by a Muslim horseman at the very gates of the city.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN ISRAEL AND GOD

My friend, the days of my affliction have compelled me
To dwell in the scorpion's and the viper's company,
In captivity.
Have mercy on me.

My soul despairs of the rise of the dawn,
To wait and hope morn after morn.
What can I say, O my lover, when
Edom is in my citadel, born free,
And I am subject to the Arab and the Admoni,
Who oppress me,
Like the dregs of humanity?

My name which once stood supreme
Has become, in strangers' mouths, a mark of shame.
The Ammonite, the Moabite, and Hagar's line,
Glorify themselves in visions because of me,
Despising the word of God and Palmoni,
Enticing me
By false prophecy.

Come let us return to the gardens, my friend,
To gather there both lilies and nard.
How can the doe live with the jackals' herd?
Awake to my harp, and my bells' harmony.
Yearn for my pomegranate, my wine that is spicy.
Gazelle, flee
Back to my sanctuary.

'Be ready for the end, even if it delays;
For I have not put another nation in your place.
You have chosen me. You also are my choice.'

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Which other people in the north, or the south, is to me
Like my son, bound as a sacrifice, my power's primacy,
Who loves me?
Which god is like me?

ISRAEL'S COMPLAINT

My love, have you forgotten how you lay between my breasts?

Why have you now sold me for ever to those who enslave me?

Did I not follow you through an unsown land;

Witness Seir, Mount Paran, Sin and Sinai?

How can you share my glory among those who are not mine,

When my love was yours, and your delight was in me?

Expelled towards Seir, thrust back towards Kedar,

Tried in the furnace of Greece, subjected to Persian tyranny,

Since I shall give you my love, give of your strength to me.

There is no saviour but you; no prisoner of hope but I.

CURTAINS OF SOLOMON

'CURTAINS of Solomon, how is it you have changed
Among the tents of Kedar, without grace or glory?'

'The peoples who lived among us before
Have left us in ruins, rubble beyond repair.
The sacred vessels are in exile and profaned.
How can you want glory from a lily among thorns?'

'Repulsed by their neighbours, sought by their Lord,
He will call all of them by name, omitting no man.
Their glory as at first shall be restored at the last.
He will kindle seven times more brightly their light that
is obscured.'

SAVE MY PEOPLE

YOUR anger has enveloped me. Envelop me now with
love.

Shall my sin stand between me and you for ever?
How long shall I seek your companionship in vain?
I uphold your right hand. You have enslaved me to the
stranger.

You who dwell on cherubs' wings, outstretched above
the ark,
Arise, look down from your dwelling. Save my people,
my Redeemer.

THE SERVANT OF GOD

If only I could be the servant of God who made me,
My friends could all desert me, if he would but befriend
me.

My maker and shepherd, I, body and soul, am your
creation.

You perceive all my thought; you discern my intention.
You measure my journeying, my steps, my relaxation.
If you help me, who can throw me down?
If you confine me, who but you can break my bonds?

My inner heart yearns to be near to you,
But my worldly cares drive me away from you.
My paths have strayed far from the way you pursue.
O God, help me to follow your truth. Give me
instruction.
Lead me gently in judgement. Stay your conviction.

I am reluctant to perform your will, in my vigour.
And so in old age what can I hope for? Of what be sure?
O God, heal me; for with you, God, is my cure.
When old age destroys me, and my strength forgets me,
Do not forsake me, my rock, do not reject me.

Broken, despairing, I remain, fearful every minute.
Because of my mocking vanity I go naked, empty-
handed.
And I am stained with my iniquity, for it is abundant.
It is sin that makes a division between you and me,
And prevents my eye from seeing the light of your glory.

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Incline my heart to serve in your kingdom's service.
Cleanse my thoughts that I may know your divineness.
Do not delay your healing power in the days of my sickness.

Answer, my God. Do not chastise. Do not withhold
reply.

Employ me again as your servant. Say: 'Here am I.'

HEAL ME, MY GOD

HEAL me, my God, and I shall be healed.
Let not your anger burn, to remove me from the earth.
My potion, my medicament, depends on you
For its weakness, or its strength, its failure or its worth.
You are the one that chooses. It is not I.
For you know what is good and what is ill.
Not on my own healing do I rely.
I look only towards your power to heal.

SINGING GOD'S PRAISE

ALL the stars of the morning sing to you,
For from you it is that they send out their light.
The sons of God glorify the mighty name,
Standing at their stations, day and night.
And the congregation of the holy re-echo them,
Hastening to your house, at dawn's first light.

MY HEART IS IN THE EAST

My heart is in the East, and I in the depths of the West.
My food has no taste. How can it be sweet?
How can I fulfil my pledges and my vows,
When Zion is in the power of Edom, and I in the fetters
of Arabia?
It will be nothing to me to leave all the goodness of Spain.
So rich will it be to see the dust of the ruined sanctuary.

JERUSALEM

BEAUTIFUL heights, joy of the world, city of a great king,
For you my soul yearns from the lands of the West.
My pity collects and is roused when I remember the past,
Your glory in exile, and your temple destroyed.
Would that I were on the wings of an eagle,
So that I could water your dust with my mingling tears.
I have sought you, although your king is away,
And snakes and scorpions oust Gilead's balm.
How I shall kiss and cherish your stones.
Your earth will be sweeter than honey to my taste.

MOUNT AVARIM

I GREET you, Mount Avarim. I greet you from all sides.
On you was gathered the best of men; in you was hewn
the choicest grave.

If you do not know him, ask the Red Sea that was divided
in two;

Or ask the bush; ask Mount Sinai, and they will reply:
'He was faithful to God's mission, though not a man of
words.'

I have vowed, with the help of God, to visit you soon.

LONGING FOR ZION

ZION, will you not ask after your imprisoned ones,
The remnant of your flocks, who seek your peace?
From west and east, and north and south,
From far and near, take greetings, from all sides,
And peace from the captive of desire, whose tears fall
Like Hermon's dew, while he longs to shed them on
your hills.

I am a jackal mourning your affliction, and when I
dream
Of the return of your captives I am a lyre accompanying
your songs.

My heart yearns for Bet-El, for Peniel,
And Mahanayim, to meet your pure ones there,
Where the Divine Presence was your neighbour, and
your Creator

Opened your gates to face the gates of heaven,
Where the glory of God alone was your light,
The sun, moon and stars hiding theirs.

I would wish my soul to be poured away
Where the spirit of God drenched your chosen ones.
The house of royalty you are, the throne of God.
How can slaves sit upon the seats of the mighty?
What would I give to traverse those places
Where God was revealed to your seers and messengers!
Who will make me wings, so I can fly away
And take my broken heart to your mountain clefts?
Let me fall prostrate upon your land, treasure
Your stones, and fondle your fine dust.
And yet, as I stand by my fathers' graves,
Your most precious tomb will astound me in Hebron.
Let me pass through your woods and fields, and stand
In Gilead, marvelling at the Mount of Avarim,

The Mount of Avarim, and the Mount of Hor, where
 The two great lights are, to guide you and illumine you.
 The air of your land is the soul's very life, your clouds
 of dust

Flowing myrrh, and liquid honey your streams.
 It would soothe my soul to walk naked and barefoot
 Upon the desolate ruins that were once your sanctuary,
 On the place of your ark, now concealed, and the spot
 In the holy of holies where your cherubim dwelt.
 I shall shear my locks and cast them away, cursing
 The time when your saints were profaned in an unclean
 land.

How can I eat and drink in equanimity when I see
 The dogs dragging your lions down?
 Or how can the light of day be sweet to my eyes
 When I see ravens' beaks picking your eagles' bones?

Slowly, O cup of sorrow, slacken now a little,
 For my body and soul are replete with bitterness.
 When I remember Oholah I drink your wrath;
 When I recall Oholivah I drain your dregs.

Zion, beauty's perfection, who have enwrapped yourself
 in love and grace,
 The souls of your companions are bound to you.
 They delight in your peace, mourn
 Your desolation, bewail your destruction.
 From the pit of captivity they aspire towards you,
 Bow, each in his place, towards your gates.
 They are the flocks of your people, exiled and scattered
 Through hill and valley, and yet they remember your
 folds.
 They cling to your robes, and strive
 To climb up and clasp your palms' top branches.
 Can Shinar and Patros compare with you in majesty?

Can their vain magic compete with your Urim and
Tummim?

Your anointed ones, your prophets, your Levites,
And your singers are beyond all parallel.

The crown of idolatrous kingdoms will entirely perish,
But your strength is for ever, your diadem endures for
days on end.

Your God desires to dwell with you, and happy is
The man who chooses to go and settle in your courts.

Happy is he who hopes to come and see

Your light rise, and your dawns break over him,
To see the happiness of your chosen ones, and to exult
In your joy, as you live youth's first vigour once more.

SELF-EXHORTATION
TO MAKE THE JOURNEY TO ISRAEL

ARE you, at fifty, pursuing your youth,
As your days are preparing to fly away?
Do you run from the worship of God.
And yearn to serve only men?
Do you seek the crowd's company and leave
The One whom all that will may seek?
Are you slow to prepare for your journey?
Will you sell your portion for a lentil stew?
Your desire continually conceives new pleasures,
But does not your soul say to you, 'Enough! '?
Exchange your desire's counsel for that of God.
Desist from pursuing your five senses.
Please your Creator in the days that remain
To you, the days which hasten by.
Do not prevaricate before his will.
Do not confront him with magic and sorcery.
Be strong like a leopard to do his command,
Swift as a gazelle, mighty as a lion.

Let your heart remain firm in the midst of the seas,
When you see the mountains heaving and bending,
And the sailors with their hands like rags,
The masters of spells tongue-tied.
They embarked on a straight course, full of joy.
But now they are forced back, overwhelmed.
The ocean is before you as your refuge!
Your only escape are the nets of the deep!
The sails tear loose and lash,
The timbers tremble and shudder,
The grip of the wind plays on the waves,
Like bearers of sheaves to the threshing.

First they are flattened to the floor of the granary,
 Then are thrown high into the stacks.
 When they rise up, they are as lions.
 When they break, they are like serpents.
 The first are pursued by the second –
 Snakes whose bite is incurable.

The mighty ship falls like a speck before God.
 The mast and its banner cannot withstand,
 The boat and its decks are confused,
 Lower, middle and upper together.
 The drawers of ropes are in torment,
 Men and women full of anguish.
 The sailors' spirits are deep in despair.
 Bodies grow weary of their souls.
 The masts' strength is of no use,
 The aged's counsel does not benefit.
 The masts of cedar are no more than stubble,
 The fir-trees are turned to reeds,
 Sand thrown into the sea is straw,
 The sockets of iron are like chaff.

The people pray, each to his holy one,
 And you turn to the Holy of Holies.
 You recall the miracles of Red Sea and Jordan,
 Inscribed as they are on every heart.
 You praise the One who calms the sea's roaring,
 When the waves throw up their slime.
 You will tell him: 'Foul hearts are pure now!'
 He will remind you of the merits of your holy forbears.
 He will renew his wonders when you perform for him
 Song and dance of Mahlim and Mushim.
 He will return the souls to their bodies,
 And the dry bones will live again.

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And soon the waves will be silent,
Like flocks scattered over the earth.
And when the sun enters the ascent of the stars,
And over them presides the moon, their captain,
The night will be like a negress clothed in gold tapestry,
Like a purple garment scattered with crystals.
And the stars will be bewildered in the heart of the sea,
Like exiles driven from their own homes.
And in their own image they will make light
In the midst of the sea like flaming fires.
The water and sky will be ornaments
Pure and shining upon the night.
The sea's colour will be as heaven's,
Both – two seas bound together,
And between them my heart, a third sea,
As the waves of my praise swell once again.

THE POET IS URGED TO REMAIN IN SPAIN

My body is a room where a heart dwells
That is bound to the wings of an eagle. Can it conquer
A man weary of life, whose whole desire
Is to smother his cheeks in the most precious of dusts?
He trembles. His tears begin to fall.
He fears to leave Spain, to travel through the world,
To embark on board ship, to cross the desert,
By the lion's den and the leopard's mountain lair.
He rebukes his friends, and decides to go.
He leaves his home and lives in the wasteland.
The wolves of the forests seem to him
To be as pretty as young girls in the eyes of men.
He imagines the kites to be musicians and singers,
The roar of the lion sounds like the shepherds' pipes.
He sets his delight on the burning desire of his heart.
His streams of tears are like a river's rapids.
He will go up to the hills and down to the valleys,
To fulfil his oath, and to complete his vows.
He will strike camp and pass through the land of Egypt
To Canaan, to the most precious mountain,
While his opponents' dissuasions resound about him,
And he hears and is silent, like a man of no words.

What is the use of reply or refutation,
And why bother to make drunkards grieve?
They congratulate him for being in the service of kings,
Which to him is like the worship of idols.
Is it right for a pious and worthy man
To be glad that he is caught, like a bird by a child,
In the service of Philistines, Hittites, and Hagar's de-
scendants,

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His heart seduced by alien deities
To do their will, and forsake that of God,
To deceive the Creator and serve his creatures?
The face of the skies seems black to him,
The cup of sweetness turns bitter in his mouth.
He is weary, hard-driven, oppressed, and weak,
And yearns for Carmel and Kiryath-yearim,
To seek forgiveness by the peaceful graves.

He yearns for the ark and tablets buried there,
Where the cherubim and the engraved stones
Lie under the earth in a hidden place.

I long to pass by them, to breathe my last by their tomb.
My eyes will see them broken, and be a source of streams.
All my thoughts will be terrified at Sinai,
My eyes and heart at Mount Avarim.

How shall I not weep, and pour forth my tears,
Since from there I hope for the raising of the dead,
And there is the home of miracles, the fount of prophecy,
All reflecting the glory of the Lord of Hosts?

I shall greet its dust, and make my dwelling there.
There I shall lament as in a cemetery,
My whole intent being to rest
Among the pure by the patriarchal graves.

Go, ship, and make for the land
Which contains the Shechinah's abode.
Hasten your flight, moved forward by God's hand.
Bind your wing to the wings of the morning breeze,
For those borne along by the wind in your sails,
For the hearts torn into a thousand pieces.

And I – I fear for the sins of my youth,
All recounted in the books of my God,
And even more for the sins of old age,

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Which renew themselves as the mornings change.
There is no atonement for my rebellion,
And how shall I go through the narrow straits?
I endanger myself, if I forget my transgression,
Since my soul and my blood are in the power of sin.
Yet trust remains in him, generous of forgiveness,
Who has power and strength to release the imprisoned.
And if he judges and convicts, whether harshly or lightly,
Whether for good or ill, his judgement is exact.

THE POET REMEMBERS HIS HOME

MY desire for the living God has constrained me
To seek out the place where my princes had their
 thrones;
So much so that it does not leave me time
To kiss the members of my house, my friends and
 companions.

I shall not weep for the garden I have planted
And watered, so that the flowers flourish there.

I shall not remember Judah and Azarael,
Two precious buds, the choicest of my blooms,
Nor Isaac, whom I have cherished like my own,
Produce of my sun, the finest crop of my moon.
I shall almost forget the very house of prayer,
In whose school-room I took my recreation.
I shall forget the delights of my Sabbaths,
The beauty of my festivals, my Passovers' glory.
The fame I might have had I give to others;
And I leave my praises to the stultified.

I have exchanged my bowers for the shadow of the
 thicket,
And the strength of my bolts for the thorn's protection.
My soul, sated with the finest of spices,
Is happy with a compound of the thistle's scent.
I no longer walk on my hands and knees,
But have set my paths in the heart of the seas,
Until I find the footstool of the feet of my God,
And there I shall pour out my thoughts and my soul.
I shall stand on the threshold of his holy mount,
And set up my doors at the gates of the skies.
By the waters of Jordan my nard shall spring up,
And I shall send out shoots by the water of Shiloach.
The Lord is mine. Can I be afraid?

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The angel of his mercy carries my arms.
I shall praise his name, throughout my life,
And confess my gratitude to him for ever.

THE POET REMEMBERS HIS FAMILY
DURING A STORM
AT SEA

You are the trust of my soul, the object of its fear.
To you it prostrates itself always and gives thanks.
In you I rejoice when I begin my voyage.
To you I am grateful every step of the way,
As the ship spreads out its sails,
Like the wings of a stork, to carry me;
As the deep groans and roars beneath me,
Learning from my inmost fears,
Churning the waters like a cauldron,
Turning the sea into a boiling crucible;
As the ships of the Kittim come to the Philistine sea,
And the Hittites go down to their ambush;
As the sea beasts strike at the boats,
The monsters expectant for their feasting;
And horror draws near, as to a woman having her first
child,
With a baby in the womb-mouth, and no strength in
her to bear.
But even if I lacked food and drink,
Your pleasant name would still be in my mouth.
I shall not care for home or property,
Nor for riches, nor for any loss.
I shall forsake the child of my loins,
My only daughter, the sister of my soul.
It splits my heart to forget her son,
With only his memory to recall him to me,
Fruit of my body, child of my delight.
How can Judah ever forget Judah!
But this is nothing compared to your love,
Until I come to your gates in gratitude,

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And shall dwell there, considering my heart
As a sacrifice bound upon your altar.
I shall set my grave upon your land
To remain there as my testimony.

THE WESTERN BREEZE

YOUR breeze, Western shore, is perfumed.
The scent of nard is in its wings, and the apple.
Your origin is in the merchants' treasures,
Surely not from the store-house of the wind.
You flutter the wings of the bird, giving him freedom;
You are like flowing myrrh straight from the phial.
How much do people long for you, since, with your help,
They are carried by wooden beams on the backs of the
waves.
Do not let your hand slacken its hold on the ship,
Whether the day is encamped, or blows fresh at the dawn.
Smooth out the deep, split the heart of the seas.
Come to the holy mountains. There you can rest.
Rebuke the East wind which enrages the sea,
Turning the waves into a boiling cauldron.
What shall a man do, chained to his Rock,
At one time confined, at another set free?
The essence of my request is in the hand of the Highest,
Who formed the mountains, who created the wind.

STORM AT SEA

I

WITH fainting heart and shaking knees I cry
To God. Terror invades my limbs
When the oarsmen are dumbfounded at the deep
And the sailors cannot summon up their strength.
Can I feel differently when I am suspended
On shipboard between sea and sky?
I stagger and reel. But this is easy to bear
Until I dance in your midst, O Jerusalem.

II

In the heart of the seas I shall say to my heart,
Fearful and trembling at the roar of the waves;
'If you have faith in God who made
The sea, and whose name will not fade,
Do not be frightened as the breakers rise.
He is at your side, and he has set a limit to the sea.'

THE ARMY OF OLD AGE

WHEN a grey hair appeared all on its own
Upon my head, I cut it down.
'You are the victor now,' it said,
'But what will you do, once my banners are spread?'

TO MOSES IBN EZRA,
IN CHRISTIAN SPAIN

How, after you, can I find rest?
You go, and my heart goes with you.
Were I not to wait for the day of your return,
Then your departure would have made my death complete.

Look, the mountains of Bether testify
That the clouds are miserly, and my tears abundant.
Return to the West, lamp of the West.
Become a seal on every heart and hand.
Why do you with your pure lips linger among stammerers?

Why does the dew of Hermon appear on Gilboa?

AMONG THE JEWS OF SEVILLE

HE who has been reared in scarlet
Cannot believe that his end will be the worm.
Time passes round its cup of pleasures to men
Unrecognized, but to me it is known.
They savour its taste, and proclaim it honey.
And I too partake, and say, 'It makes men reel.'
They look upon their silver as the Tree of Life,
And so the Tree of Knowledge makes them turn tail.
Hear, you deaf ones – and the man who speaks
To an ear that listens is a fortunate being –
Why do you think wisdom is a burning coal?
If you only possessed it, it would be a golden ring.

But how can they hunt for it, since they prefer sleep,
And God has made even their paragons toothless?
How can this burden be borne by dozing asses,
Who labour enough just to carry their saddles?
The herd of beasts crouch continually by the wall
And they do not know before whom they kneel.
If they swear by God, do not believe them,
Because they swear by a Being whom they do not know
at all.

'Away!' they say to God, and refuse to know
The mystery of his paths, the secret of his law.
No one can be successful in the company of the mad,
Unless he converts to insanity before.

My soul might have perished in the misery
Of this people, braggart but corrupt,
Were it not for the presence of Meir,
Whose love makes my soul rejoice and exult.
I chose him as a place for seed, and I found

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A harvest of love, a crop sown with affection,
His hands like the Tree of Life, the Tree of Knowledge
 on his lips,
His face, the face of the sun that does not know oblivion.
They see his few years, and then his brilliant mind.
Till now they have not seen perfection without a stain.
When they gaze upon this precious vine they say,
‘Where was this found, where is this plant’s home?’
If they had seen his fathers, they would have said,
‘This is a virtue that is handed down from father to son.’
Just as Aaron was worthy to wear the mitre of the priest,
So it is right for Meir to don his father’s glorious crown.

THE APPLE

You have captured me with your charm, my lady;
You have enslaved me brutally in your prison.
From the very day that we had to part
I have found no likeness to your beauty.
I console myself with a rosy apple,
Whose scent is like the myrrh of your nose and your lips,
Its shape like your breast, and its colour
Like the hue which is seen on your cheeks.

MY LOVE WASHES HER CLOTHES

My love washes her clothes in the water
Of my tears, and her brilliance makes them dry.
Having my two eyes, she does not need
Well-water. Her beauty contains the sun.

page 119 *Dialogue between Israel and God*, S, I, 482.

The first four verses contain the complaint and supplication of Israel; the fifth verse is God's reply.

Edom is in my citadel. Edom was a term used for the Christian nations, who were at this time in possession of Jerusalem, the Jews' 'citadel'. See Dunash ha-Levi ben Labrat, 'A Song for the Sabbath', and the notes thereon.

the Admoni. lit. 'ruddy', a description of the baby Esau in Genesis xxv, 25. Esau was the ancestor of Edom. This too, therefore, refers to the Christians.

Like the dregs of humanity. lit. 'the dogs of my flock', a derogatory phrase in Job xxx, 1.

Hagar's line. The Muslims, descended from Ishmael, the son of Abraham and Hagar.

in visions. i.e. the prophetic visions of other faiths contain denunciations of the Jews.

Palmoni. lit. 'that certain one', mentioned in Daniel viii, 13, who gives the date of the redemption of Israel.

Enticing me By false prophecy. i.e. the other nations try to persuade Israel to abandon their faith.

Come, let us return. An exhortation to return to Israel, based largely on the phraseology of the Song of Songs, which is itself interpreted as a dialogue between God and Israel.

my son, bound as a sacrifice. The reference is to Isaac.

NOTES

my power's primacy. A biblical phrase, denoting the first-born son. Cf. Genesis xl, 3.

page 121 *Israel's Complaint*, S, I, 466; B, 169.

This poem was written to be said in conjunction with the *Nishmath* prayer. See note on page 195.

My love. Israel speaks to God in the phraseology of the Song of Songs (i, 13).

Witness Seir, Mount Paran, Sin and Sinai. Places in which God manifested himself to the Israelites during their journey from Egypt to Canaan. Cf. Exodus xvi, 1; Deuteronomy xxxiii, 2.

How can you . . . I have interchanged this, and the following line.

Seir. A land of Edom. Hence, a reference to the Christian nations. See note on previous poem.

Kedar. A tribe named after the son of Ishmael (Genesis xxv, 13). Hence, a reference to the Muslim nations.

Since I shall give you . . . I have interchanged this and the following line.

page 122 *Curtains of Solomon*, S, I, 481; B, 158.

Curtains of Solomon . . . tents of Kedar. Cf. Cant. i, 5. Here the reference is to the Jews dwelling among the Muslims.

The sacred vessels. i.e. the utensils which formerly were used in the Temple in Jerusalem.

seven times more brightly. Cf. Isaiah xxx, 26: ‘Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, And the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of the seven days, In the day that the Lord bindeth up the bruise of His people, And healeth the stroke of their wound.’

page 123 *Save My People*, S, I, 464; B, 169.

outstretched above the ark. See Exodus xxv, 19 ff. See also the note on the poem ‘The Poet is Urged to Remain in Spain’ on page 206. On God dwelling between the cherubim, see 1 Samuel iv, 4: ‘The Lord of Hosts, who sitteth upon the cherubim.’

I uphold your right hand. I have translated *kannah* as ‘pillar’

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(lit. 'I am the pillar of your right hand'). However, the phrase comes from Psalm lxxx, 16 where it is usually translated as 'plant' or 'vine'. The translation of the Jewish Publication Society of America is 'of the stock which thy right hand hath planted.' I have reversed the order of this and the following line.

page 124 *The Servant of God*, S, I, 519; B, 154.

the way you pursue. i.e. the way in which God conducts himself, as it were, towards man; a way which man should imitate.

It is sin that makes a division . . . Cf. Isaiah lix, 2: 'But your iniquities have separated Between you and your God, And your sins have hid His face from you.'

Employ me. The use of the Hebrew verb, *qanah*, implies 'purchase' as well as 'creation'. The implications are manifold, including the idea that the poet wishes, once more, to be proclaimed God's servant, like the Israelites at the time of the Exodus, who were redeemed from Egyptian bondage in order to be created the servants of God.

'*Here am I*'. The Biblical phrase used by one replying to a divine summons. The poet's image of God using this phrase is both daring, and pregnant with meaning concerning the dialogue between man and God. For a biblical parallel see Isaiah lviii, 9.

page 126 *Heal Me, My God*, S, I, 527.

The Arabic inscription at the head of this poem reads: 'Said when he was about to drink a healing medicine'. (Schirmann.) Ha-Levi practised medicine.

Heal me, my God, and I shall be healed. A quotation from Jeremiah xvii, 14, included, with a change from singular to plural, in the *Amidah* prayer (Singer, 49).

page 127 *Singing God's Praise*, S, I, 527.

On the interconnection between the praise offered by the angels and that offered by man, see the notes on 'Sanctification', page 181.

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All the stars of the morning sing to you. Cf. Job xxxviii, 7: ‘... the morning stars sang together, And all the sons of God shouted for joy.’

Hastening ... lit. they awake every dawn, to seek your house.

page 128 *My Heart is in the East*, S, I, 489; B, 179.

Here begins a series of poems based on the poet’s yearning to visit the Holy Land. See the Biographical Introduction.

my pledges and my vows. i.e. the poet’s vows to travel to the Holy Land.

in the power of Edom. i.e. in Christian hands, since the conquest of Palestine by the Crusaders in 1099.

in the fetters of Arabia. i.e. in Muslim territory, Spain.

page 129 *Jerusalem*, S, I, 489; B, 183.

Beautiful heights. Cf. Psalm xlvi, 3; ‘Fair in situation, the joy of the whole earth; Even mount Zion, the uttermost parts of the north, The city of the great King.’

Your glory in exile. i.e. the Divine Presence which, according to a rabbinic tradition, followed the Jews into exile.

Gilead’s balm. Cf. Jeremiah viii, 22; xlvi, 11.

page 130 *Mount Avarim*, S, I, 490.

Mount Avarim. Or Mount Nebo (Deuteronomy xxxii, 49) where Moses died.

On you was gathered the best of men. Cf. Deuteronomy xxxii, 50: ‘die in the mount whither thou goest up, and be gathered unto thy people’.

the bush. i.e. the burning bush of Exodus iii.

not a man of words. Cf. Exodus iv, 10; ‘And Moses said unto the Lord: “Oh Lord, I am not a man of words ... for I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.”’

page 131 *Longing for Zion*, S, I, 485; B, 179.

the captive of desire. Cf. the biblical phrase ‘prisoner of hope’, Zechariah ix, 12.

Bet-El ... Peniel ... Mahanayim. Three places connected with the life of Jacob, in each of which he had experience of God; Genesis, xxviii and xxxii.

to face the gates of heaven. The Holy Land was considered to be the highest point on earth, and in ha-Levi's view, particularly, as portrayed in his philosophical work *The Kuzari*, it had natural characteristics which made it supreme above all other lands.

slaves. i.e. the non-Jewish rulers of the Holy Land in ha-Levi's time.

mountain clefts. *Betarayich*, a pun on the mountains of Bether; see note on page 208.

Hebron. The traditional site of Abraham's tomb. See Genesis xxii.

The two great lights. Moses and Aaron. Moses died on Mount Avarim and Aaron on Mount Hor (Deuteronomy xxxii, 49 f.).

now concealed. See note p. 206 on 'for the ark and tablets buried there'.

I shall shear my locks. As a sign of mourning. Cf. Jeremiah vii, 29.

Oholah ... Oholivah. Samaria and Jerusalem (Ezekiel xxiii, 4).

Shinar and Patros. Babylon and Egypt (Isaiah xi, 11).

Urim and Tummim. Used for prognostication by the High Priest.

page 134 *Self-exhortation To Make the Journey to Israel*, S, I, 494; B, 180.

The One whom all that will may seek. Brody's text reads 'The One who may be sought for anything.'

for your journey. A double entendre, referring both to the particular journey to the Holy Land, and to the journey towards the life to come.

for a lentil stew. A reference to Esau's sale of his birthright to Jacob (Genesis xxv, 29 ff.). Here, it is an image of material pleasure.

Your desire continually conceives new pleasures. lit. 'your desire

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produces new fruit every month'. I have reversed the order of this and the succeeding verse.

Do not confront him with magic and sorcery. The reference here is to Balaam (Numbers xxiv, 1 ff.), the pagan seer, who had not the power to resist God's demands.

Be strong like a leopard. Cf. 'Ethics of the Fathers', 5, 23: 'Judah, the son of Tema, said: Be strong as a leopard, light as an eagle, fleet as a hart, and strong as a lion, to do the will of thy Father who is in heaven.' (Singer, 274 f.)

Let your heart remain firm . . . Cf. Psalm xlvi, 3: 'Therefore will we not fear, though the earth do change, And though the mountains be moved into the heart of the seas.'

The fir-trees. i.e. the ship's planks and beams made of the fir-tree.

Sand thrown into the sea. i.e. the ship's ballast, quantities of which were thrown overboard as necessity dictated (Schirmann).

'Foul hearts are pure now.' A confession of sin, and a prayer for forgiveness and rescue.

the merits of your holy forbears. The merits of the patriarchs which are considered to be efficacious for their descendants.

Mahlim and Mushim. Levitical families (Numbers iii, 33) whose descendants would have sung and danced in the Temple. They are referred to here, since they are regarded by the poet, a Levite, as his own ancestors.

when the sun enters the ascent of the stars. lit. 'when the sun sinks through the degrees of the heavenly host.' The description is that of the rise of the moon and the stars as the sun sets.

the moon, their captain. lit. 'captain of fifty'. Cf. Isaiah iii, 3. There is possibly an allusion here to the poet's age.

bewildered in the heart of the sea. This and the following verses describe the reflection of the sky in the sea at night, and their apparent intermingling at the horizon.

page 137 *The Poet is Urged To Remain in Spain*, S, I, 497; B, 187.
the most precious mountain. Mount Zion.

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Philistines, Hittites, and Hagar's descendants. The Berbers are designated as Philistines, and the Arabs as the descendants of Hagar. See notes on pages 187 and 200. Who the Hittites are meant to represent is not clear.

Kiryath-yearim. The place where the ark remained for twenty years after its return from the Philistines (1 Samuel vi, 21-vii, 2).

for the ark and tablets buried there. The ark contained the tablets. See *Yoma*, 52b: 'When the ark was hidden, there was hidden with it the bottles containing the manna, and that containing the sprinkling water ... and the chest which the Philistines had sent as a gift to the God of Israel ... Who hid it? - Josiah hid it.' See also 53a-54b.

Where the cherubim and the engraved stones ... I have transposed this and the following verse to this point in the poem, in accordance with a note by Schirmann. The cherubim were placed on each side of the ark in the Holy of Holies in the Temple (see Exodus xxv, 18 ff.). 'The engraved stones' refers to the two tablets of the Ten Commandments.

Mount Avarim. Where Moses died. See the poem 'Mount Avarim'.

the raising of the dead. A rabbinic tradition holds that at the coming of the Messiah, the Jews will be resurrected in the Holy Land.

the home of miracles, the fount of prophecy. According to ha-Levi's philosophy, as expressed in 'The Kuzari' (see especially II, 14), all prophecy was spoken in the Holy Land or about the Holy Land.

the Shechinah's abode. *Shechinah* means the Divine Presence which has its home particularly in the Holy Land.

through the narrow straits. This refers to the difficult path of atonement and salvation. The Hebrew term is used in Psalm cxvi, 5 ('the straits of Sheol'), and the phrase used here is from Lamentations i, 3: 'All her pursuers overtook her within the straits.'

page 140 *The Poet Remembers His Home*, S, I, 501; B, 183.

the garden I have planted. This refers apparently to the circle

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of disciples which the poet formed in Spain (Schirmann).
like my own. lit. 'Like a son'.

Produce of my sun, the finest crop of my moon. Cf. Deuteronomy xxxiii, 14: '... for the precious things of the fruits of the sun, And for the precious things of the yield of the moons.'

on my hands and knees. lit. 'on my hand and face', an image of his subservience to other men.

the footstool, i.e. the sanctuary in Jerusalem.

the gates of the skies. Cf. Genesis xxviii, 17: 'this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.'

Shiloach. A fountain and pool, south-east of Jerusalem.

page 142 *The Poet Remembers His Family during a Storm at Sea*, S, I, 502.

Learning from my inmost fears. i.e. the sea is troubled as the poet himself is troubled.

As the ships of the Kittim come to the Philistine sea. The Kittim represent the Romans in rabbinic sources. Here the Christians are meant. The Philistine sea would be the Western Mediterranean which washes the coast of the Berber territories. See note on page 187.

the Hittites. The reference is not clear. They may, according to Schirmann, denote North African pirates.

Your pleasant name would still be in my mouth. lit. 'I shall place your pleasant name in my mouth for food.'

my heart. lit. my liver.

How can Judah ever forget Judah? i.e. How can the grandfather, Judah, ever forget his grandson, Judah?

your love. i.e. the love for God.

page 144 *The Western Breeze*, S, I, 504.

the store-house of the wind. Cf. Psalm cxxxv, 7: 'He bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures.'

chained to his Rock. i.e. solely dependent upon God. lit. 'bound by the hand of the Rock.'

At one time confined, at another set free. Schirmann interprets this as referring to the journey of a ship, sometimes becalmed,

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sometimes swiftly moving. It may also refer generally to the life of the Jew.

page 145 *Storm at Sea*, I and II, S, I, 505.

Until I dance in your midst. The Hebrew has the specific meaning of 'to celebrate a festival'.

page 146 *The Army of Old Age*, S, I, 444.

page 147 *To Moses ibn Ezra, in Christian Spain*, S, I, 461.

For the background to this poem see the biographical introduction to Moses ibn Ezra on page 103. According to the inscription to this poem, Moses ibn Ezra was living in Estella, in Navarre.

your departure would have made my death complete. The poet says that Moses' departure almost deprives him of life. Only the hope of his return keeps Judah alive.

mountains of Bether. Cf. Canticles ii, 17 (where the Jewish version translates 'mountains of spices'). The Hebrew word *Bether* comes from a root meaning 'to cut' or 'to divide'. We might, therefore, translate 'mountains of separation'.

Return to the West. The term 'West' was used generally by poets of the period to indicate Muslim Spain.

lamp of the West. In addition to the obvious metaphorical meaning of this phrase, Schirmann notes its association with the passage in *Menahot* 86b which describes how the western lamp of the Temple candelabrum, although containing no more oil than the others, miraculously burned longer.

Gilboa. A mountain cursed by David in 2 Samuel i, 21: 'Ye mountains of Gilboa, Let there be no dew nor rain upon you.'

page 148 *Among the Jews of Seville*, S, I, 447.

the Tree of Life . . . the Tree of Knowledge. i.e. the Jews of Seville think that material prosperity will bring them eternal life, and so they despise the search for wisdom.

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The herd of beasts crouch continually by the wall. A picture of the Seville Jews at prayer. Cf. Isaiah xxxviii, 2: 'Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the Lord.'

braggart but corrupt. lit, 'who have raised their horn on high, but it is cut down.'

Meir. Abulhassan Meir ibn Kamniah, of a noble Seville family. He held high office in Spain, and later was physician to the Almoravide rulers in Fez (Schirmann). A patron of poets, he was celebrated also in the verses of Moses ibn Ezra.

Just as Aaron was worthy. I have reversed the order of this and the following line.

page 150 *The Apple*, S, I, 440.

page 151 *My Love Washes Her Clothes*, S, I, 439.